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Nyakyusa

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Notes on the daily life of the Nyakyusa (Tanganyika Territory)

Cf. Sociologus 1951, I, 1 S. 53 ff.

By F. Rudolf Lehmann

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1. Greetings. The first thing to strike a visitor to the Nyakyusa country north of Lake Nyasa on passing through one of the numerous picturesque villages surrounded by banana groves is the way of greeting customary among these people. "*Ukuponya*" is the Nyakyusa word for "to greet". In the morning you are greeted with the exclamation: "*ugonile* (pl. *mugonile*)", which literally means: "Did you sleep well?" And you may answer in the same way, or, in fuller form as you can hear it from the mouth of the natives: "*ee'e ndaga, ugonile*", or "*ugonile yoyoque*". "*ee'e ndaga*" may be used with all answers, meaning: thanks! At noon or in the afternoon you will hear: "*wesombide*", you have worked, or, have you worked? Then, according to the case, you may answer: "*nasombide ewanda*", you, men, have worked, or, generally: "*nasangere*", which is equivalent to the Swahili: "*habari gani?*". If you greet a person in the evening with the words: "*ugonaga*", may you sleep well, the person thus addressed will answer: "*kagonaga*".

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2. Milking. The first task in the daily life of the Nyakyusa people is for the men to milk the cows. This is done in the morning before the cattle are driven out to graze and again in the evening when they return. But the cattle are also driven back to the village at noon when

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they are usually fumigated standing in the smoke of a fire for which cow dung and banana leaves are used, a process designed to remove vermin from the skin of the cattle. The animals seem to be very fond of this procedure. They stand quietly in the smoke gazing at the passers-by.

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3. Hoeing. "Hoeing is the work of men, planting weeding, reaping is the work of women. The men, young and old, hoe for about four hours on most mornings of the year; in the lower altitudes they begin well before sunrise and finish about 9 a. m., on the upland plateau they

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begin later and continue till noon or beyond. The energetic ones sometimes hoe again for an hour or two in the late afternoon. Different crops are planted at different seasons of the year so that there is always some hoeing to be done." (G. Wilson, Introduction, p. 380).

The putting of maize-grains as seed into the earth is the women's work, the sowing of millet (*malesi*) of both sexes. If you ask the men after they had come home from their work: "*Mukumbide ifiwanya fya nongi?*", "Whose fields did you hoe?", the answer often may be: "*Tukumbide ifiwanya fya tata!*" We have hoed the fields of our father.

In former times, the Nyakyusa had a lot of ceremonies relating to the beginning of the hoeing season and of the beginning of the harvest-work. They are, however, nowadays nearly extinguished under the influence of European culture.

With respect to the beginning of the hoeing season, a very comprehensive ceremony had to be carried out by the chief in community with the unpenga (medicine man) for providing the fields with extraordinary (*-siryu*) power (*amaka*): *amaka amasiryu*, in this case: fertility.

When the crop was ripe, it was (at first) forbidden (*mutko*) to take anything from the crop before the chief had given the permission. First the oldest male villagers informed the chief that it may be now the just time to give the crop free for the people, saying: "The people is hungry, we will now give them to eat!" Then the chief ordered that 6 or 8 (maize') corn-cobs were brought to him, and he sent these corn-cobs by a messenger to the (holy) offering-grove where they must be put down. After that has been correctly executed, he gave the permission for reaping the new crop.

(NB. It was believed that those corn-cobs put into the offering-grove were eaten especially from the leopards. The powderes bones of the leopards were considered important ingredients of the consecration drink which the chief had to take at his initiation ceremonies and which should give him the strength (*amaka*) of a leopard, so that he also was called "the leopard" or "the leopard chief".)

4. *Herding the Cattle and Cleansing the Stables.* The sociological importance of cattle among the Nyakyusa and the specific practice among them of herding the cattle by herdboys, that is also of highly sociological importance for the structure of the Nyakyusa society, is already described by G. Wilson (Introduction, p. 389 f).

The cleansing of the stables of which the Nyakyusa possess a great number of very well built ones, which have also sometimes a considerable length — apart from the cattle kraals —, is the task of

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233 343 462 [413] the woman, but the men are responsible for keeping the floor of the stable in good repair. For this purpose a specific tool is used, called *akutobo indobelo*. It is round on top, flattened on the lower side and provided with a handle.

224 *3. Hunting.* Sometimes the Nyakyusa go out to hunt, but nowadays hunting is much more restricted than in former times as described e. g by Mackenzie in his book: "The spirit-ridden Konde" (London 1925). This record, however, deals mostly with the Ngonde of the environment of Karonga whose interesting social history was unsurpassably revealed to us by Mr. Godfrey Wilson's treatise: "The Constitution of Ngonde" (The Rhodes-Livingstone Papers, Number Three. Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia 1939.) Hunting in the Nyakyusa country is now curtailed by governmental regulations. Hunting (*ukufuma*), therefore, does not supply an essential part of the food requirements of the natives. The colobus apes on the slopes of the Rungwe volcano and the Poroto Mountains are sometimes killed for their attractive black and white skins, but fortunately this is now forbidden by the government. Otherwise these apes would be exterminated in quite a short time, since the skins of these apes are in great demand with some Europeans for rugs and covers. Naturally, the hunting of lions and especially of leopards, which even nowadays still cause great damage, is not restricted.

224 231 The hunting of game for food is often done with dogs (*imbwa*) which have small bells (*ingwe*) on collars round their necks. Thereby the hunter (*umfuemi*) always knows the whereabouts of his dog. The chase is continued till the dog or dogs are exhausted. The object of the hunt (*umfuema*) is generally a small type of antelope (*ukaspa*), e. g. in the environment of Mwakalele, as I was instructed. The usual time for hunting is the cooler season, but to-day a permit of the government is also required.

223 Catching birds by means of traps (*intego*, pl. *imitego*) is still common in the Nyakyusa area. I have also seen such traps constructed by means of the flicking-gallow's principle also in the vicinity of Utengule among the Safwa. The herd boys especially set traps to catch quails (*imbusi*) when the maize (millet) harvest is over. Sometimes smaller birds are also coursed until they are exhausted and then slain. One day I found a stick vertically put on the soil and with a triangle made of smaller sticks at its top. The horizontal part of which was smeared with an adhesive substance. I was told that this was a trap for birds.

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but I was astonished that this trap was erected relatively near to my tent on the border of the village of Katumba.

4. *Fishing.* Fishing is a much more common practice with the Nyakyusa than hunting. The old-established custom of poisoning fish in their smaller rivers is still widely used. The poison is derived from the *mkerede* shrub. Its branches and leaves are broken off, reduced to small pieces between stones and then packed in a covering of grass to resemble a long cigar about 1 meter in length and 25 cm in width. The bundles prepared in such a manner are fixed between two rows of stones placed across the river for this purpose. The poison gradually diffuses into the water, which takes on a green colour. The fish are soon affected by the poison and rise to the surface with gaping mouths. They are then easily caught with a scoop made from bamboo. The open end of a piece of bamboo is split into several sections and the splinters are bent apart and tied together with raffia to form a sort of funnel[1]. The fish are strung through their gills on small pliable sticks and roasted at home over a fire. All people are allowed to join in this fishing which to them is always a festive occasion in the cooler season.

Fishing in broader and deeper rivers, such as the lower Kiwira, is done by means of large fish-traps. They are made and repaired by men on the banks of the river. The traps are attached to poles rammed into the bed and almost invariably boats trying to reach the Lake Nyasa get struck on submerged poles. These large fish-traps strung across the river form quite an impressive sight. Looking up-stream, they look like the bows of little ships standing in a row.

7. *Preparing food.* With the Nyakusa the preparation of food is so exclusively the task of the women, that R. Thurnwald is quite correct when says (Black and White in East Africa, London 1935, p. 137): "Menfolk starve if there are no women to prepare their meals". There is thus a very strong division of labour between the sexes, also noticable in the carrying of loads. For a young man to carry the load of an old woman or his sweetheart, whom perchance he might meet on the road, would be a grave violation of a rigid custom.

As the preparation of the food is the women's duty, also the grinding (*kusaga*) of the corn in a mortar (*ikinali*) with a pestle (*ikitiye*) which is the exclusive task of the female sex. The wife is always the first to rise in the morning to prepare breakfast. Usually, however, this is not

[1] NB. They are of the same kind as those of the Hottentots along the Great Fish River in South West Africa.

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very substantial, the main meal being taken in the evening shortly before sunset.

8. Manufacture. The pot for cooking (*indeku*) is placed on three stones which form the hearth (*ikipembere*, hearth stones). The flat bowl made of clay used for the needs of the kitchen is called *ulusengubia* and a pig pot used for storing water *ingumbe*. The pots of clay are manufactured by Kisi women because in their land on the north-eastern shores of Lake Nyasa the best clay is found. In the eastern part of the Nyakyusa country adjacent to Kisi land the women visit the pottery markets of the Kisi, but to the remoter villages, e. g. around the Rungwe volcano the pottery is brought by Kisi men. In this case, owing to the great distance from the Kisi-Land the men carry the loads of eight to ten pots on their head between split poles of bamboo. The Kisi pots I saw in the Rungwe Station were ornamented in a rough way with red ochre and seemed only slightly baked. The hearth stones, however, are made by the Nyakyusa women themselves as I was able to observe near Butengania, where widows manufactured them for sale.

In many villages of the Nyakyusa I could watch basket-making. This I saw being done by men. In the chief's hut in Katumbe I had the opportunity to admire a great number of very big baskets (*ifituba*) for storing grain, smeared with cow dung on the outside. The attractive closely wickered baskets, which are filled with *malevi* (millet) and then placed in water for a night in the process of beer-brewing were originally made by the Bunyi, but nowadays also the Nyakyusa are said to be skilled enough to weave them. I had no opportunity to observe it, but could acquire an excellent specimen of that wicker-work.

9. The Meal. At the beginning of each meal the hands are washed, including those of children. The men take their meal separately from the women. The wives only eat when their husbands have been satisfied. Boys under ten years eat with their mothers, but as soon as they begin to live in age-set villages, they eat together with their friends of their own age-set, as described in detail by Mr. G. Wilson in his "Introduction of Nyakyusa Society" (Bantu Studies X, p. 271). The head of the family likes to eat together with his friends.

Meat is eaten very seldom, but on special occasions such as marriages, death lamentations, christenings of Christianized natives, enormous quantities are devoured. *Inyama* (Swahili: *nyama*) is the Nyakyusa word for all sorts of meat, *ingombe* for that of cattle and *ingonbuke* for that of oxen. Near Utengule I saw black pigs (*ingurwe*, pig)

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grubbing for food outside the stable. Old people also eat the meat of apes (*sulile, ape*) and of jakal (*ingebe*). The Nyakyusa men are generally very fond of eating fowl, indeed: "Wakugona ingoma nye inguku", they are fond of the flesh of fowl.

Bones are usually given to the children for gnawing. Eight to ten boys may be seen sitting in a circle and alternately gnaw on the same bone, often drinking a little milk (*ulukowa*) the while.

During a boating on Lake Nyasa I saw the well-known columnar clouds formed by the so-called Kungu-flies in the distance above the surface of the water. These flies are also eaten by the peoples on the shore of the Lake. When these insects come shore-wards they are caught, roasted at home and then eaten. But I was told that sometimes they are also caught and eaten out on the Lake, being squeezed into lumps between the hands.

The Nyakyusa eat with the right hand, but when the meal consists of such food as boiled maize and beans (*inguta*) they also use spoons (*ulusiko*) made of folded strips of banana leaves. Nowadays, however, tin spoons and tin plates have come into wide use. The ancient eating-mats (*ukutefa*, diminutive of *urutefa*) are also being more and more displaced.

When the meal is over, the vessels and plates are cleaned with the fingers, bent inward, and then licked off. The mouth is rinsed out with water.

16. Diet. The vegetable diet is roughly the following. The light meal in the morning consists mostly of boiled maize-cobs (*inguta*), sweet potatoes (*imbutata*), bananas (*ilitoki*, pl. *amatoki*), roasted bananas; or, *amanzifa*, sweet bananas. The main meal in the evening, shortly before sunset, usually consists of flour porridge (*ubiyindi*), beans (*indima*), both often boiled together with maize, peas (*efingega*) very often in the form of porridge, maize-corns (*ikirombo*) and groundnuts (*ingobola*, pl. *amangobola*). These groundnuts are dried in the sun on mats. Bananas, if dried in the same manner, are usually halved lengthwise and spread out sometimes on banana leaves. I have seen this done in the village of Katumbe. Granary stores are very often, e. g. near Utengule (on the border of Nyakyusa and Safwa culture), erected on platforms supported by poles. The container is a big quadrangular basket, roughly three by three metres in length and 1 m in height. The roof has the shape of a large Chinese hat and can be taken off from the lower part of the granary.

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262 The tender leaves of pumpkins and taro plants (*amasimbi*, leaves of taro), as well as of a number of other plants growing wild (*indeke*) are also used as vegetables. This food is called *iseke*, a word denoting all sorts of green vegetables.

In his treatise on "The Land Rights of Individuals among the Nyakyusa" (The Rhodes-Livingstone Papers, No. 1; 1938, p. 43). G. Wilson points out that the fruit of the *so* — called *unyungusti* — tree is "both delicious to eat and also full of seeds which are dried and crushed for ointment (*ingemba*)", but he adds that he had been unable to find out the botanical name of this useful tree. Perhaps the following passage in the article of Dr. Kerr Cross ("Notes on the Country Lying between Lakes Nyasa and Tanganyika"; Proc. Roy. Geogr. Inst. N.S.Vol. XIII, 1891, p. 98) may be helpful in this connection: "There is a tree of the sycamore family which grows extensively all over the north of the lake called *mwisyungute* by the natives which might be developed. It is a most picturesque tree which produces a food, an oil, and a dye. The oil or fat, when cool, is solid, even at a tolerably high temperature, and is like beeswax. It burns well as a night-light, and with wax might be made into candles. In a rude way I have made candles of it. It might also make an excellent soap."

273 As an adjunct to these foods curdy milk (*ulukoma uluko/u*) is very much esteemed*, to say nothing of the various types of beer, mostly prepared from millet for the men. Large fields of millet are, therefore, to be seen everywhere in the land of the Nyakyusa. On one occasion I attended a beer drink in the hut of a chief. The conduct of the natives present, the chief and his advisers (*amafumu*), was in every respect praise-worthy. Pleasant and interesting stories were narrated. Not infrequently the invitation of a commoner who has had some difference with his chief or one of the *amafumu* to such a feast is regarded as a gesture of reconciliation.

243 As in the time of Sir H. H. Johnston so also to-day "all the easy-meadows are planted with rice." A traveller coming from the hilly region to the north on nearing Lake Nyasa is struck by numerous large fields of rice in the plain at the northern end of the lake.

178 *11. Crafts.* Mackenzie (1925) is certainly justified in complaining of the decay of the arts and crafts among the Nyakyusa. The Indian and European influence is to be seen everywhere in the deterioration and final dissolution of these branches of the ancient culture of the Nyaky-

* A. Wilson, Introduction, p. 886.

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ons. It is true that one still meets blacksmiths on the outskirts of the villages or some distance away from them (as in the case of the Ndali tribe, western to the Nyakyusa area), but they no longer smelt the iron from ore mined by themselves as in former times. The smith of to-day remelt only scrap iron from disused motor-cars and other machines into tools, hatchets, and spear-heads, unless, of course, the natives prefer to buy imported iron-ware. As with the Chaga, also the Nyakyusa smith can only be persuaded to submit to being photographed after long negotiation and a change into better clothes. The blacksmiths I met in the Rundali Mountains, however, made no objections whatever to being photographed at their work. Also women were allowed to attend. But one feature of the ancient Nyakyusa blacksmith's culture has been preserved till the present day: the lower part of the bellows through which the air blast is driven into the fire is still made of wood. This feature has been defined by H. Baumann as an element of the "ancient nigritic culture".

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12. Dress. The cloths of the Nyakyusa have changed to a very considerable degree since the beginning of European influence. A comparison of the earliest pictures and descriptions of inhabitants at the northern end of Lake Nyasa with the dress of modern times brings out this point most forcibly. Originally the Nyakyusa went almost naked, adorned only with rings and belts, but nowadays all degrees of compromise with European fashions of dress are to be found, especially near the European settlements and Mission Stations. The most conservative element are, in this case, the women. It is still possible to-day to observe in each village the preparation of the long strips of bark (*ulipuki*, pl. *amabi*) commonly worn by the women. The so-called *impundapunda* (Fotheringham: *mlamba*) tree furnishes the dress material. After the bark has been immersed in water, the bast is beaten with wooden instruments and then pulled off from the harder parts of the bark. These tools are like hammers; the flat end of such an implement is furrowed, sometimes with a disk made of horn, and as it produces pattern on the bast it is called "*ubumbebe*", that which produces pattern. These long belts, almost reaching the ground, especially in front, are mostly ruby coloured, but the women sitting in front of their huts manufacture also other types with geometrical (triangular) patterns in yellow and brown forming only girdles (*umpanga*). In addition to this minimum requirement in the way of dress some women around the waist also wear copper belts (*mangeta*), made of thin copper-wire, spirally wound on a core of hairs from the tails of cows. These

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bells are also worn by men, nowadays below the other clothing. More and more pieces of cotton with imprinted patterns have come into vogue. They are worn around the lower part of the body or below the shoulders or fastened about one of them, and are bought from Indian shops. That this modern fashion, however, is something new in such places which are a little remoter from direct European influence was demonstrated to me when I came through a small village in the environment of Masoko. There by chance I met some young girls carrying a piece of cloth on the top of a long pole as if it were a banner. On enquiry I was told that this "banner" was nothing other than a piece of cloth newly bought by a woman of that village and that it was hoisted on a pole and carried in procession out of sheer joy that this woman had been able to buy it.

Menfolk throughout are fuller dressed, especially when they go dancing. The women, on the other hand, wear their ordinary dress also on such occasions. The dancing costume of the men — only the younger men participate in dancing — consists of a sort of tight-jacket or sweater and wide robes with coloured patterns. The hair is adorned with feathers. At work the men mostly wear only loin cloths or aborts. After work especially the older man wrap their bodies in blankets. It is very seldom nowadays to find even very old men still wearing the former national dress: a bundle of long grass in front and a smaller one behind tied to the waist by means of a string, as I found a man on a military spot near Rungwe Station. Little boys go altogether naked until they are about three years of age. Little girls begin to wear a small amabi at an earlier age.

13. Art. One of the most interesting and striking features in the artistic endowment of the Nyakyusa are the decorations on the outer-walls of their huts. The latter are only painted, however, when the exterior of the framework of bamboo is mud covered, otherwise only the wooden doors (ikifuje, door) of the huts are painted. By no means every hut or house is painted, but only a limited number in each village, probably depending on the presence and industry of an artist as this art is as in other cases an individualistic one. One such artist was introduced to me in a village near Rutenganio. The ornaments consist in most cases of geometrical patterns in white and black, seldom in other colours, or they represent different sorts of animals, e. g. elephants, horses, cattle, snakes, etc. The richest designs I found in a long extended village on the right bank of the upper Kiwira. In an other case the names of the animals were written in Swahili below

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the figures. Also bicycles, aeroplanes, motor-cars and other striking objects of the European civilization are to be found represented and concentric white circles adjacent to these drawings or paintings.

14. Houses. Sometimes the upper portion of the framework of the rectangular houses is not fully plastered with mud leaving broad open areas or stripe horizontally or slopingly to the base-line. This may have its origin in an artistic motive and at the same time be useful in ventilating the interior of the hut. The ancient custom of the Nyakyusa to fill out the spaces between the framework of the walls with flat, oval cakes or clods of clay, supported inside the house by a second framework of bamboo (*umumango*), has also a decorative effect.

The preparation of those oval sun-dried clay cakes is the work of the women. L. Monteith Fotheringham described this in his "Adventures in Nyasaland" (London 1891, p. 22) with the following words: "The women make the bricks in shape like large eggs by pressing the clay between their hands." The building of the framework of the hut and the thatching of the roof is the task of the men. Nyumba means "the house" in Kinyakyusa as wellas in Swahili; *isyenga* is the name for the old-fashioned hut of the Nyakyusa possessing a round baseline and a framework expanding upwards in diameter. The rectangular hut is called *ikibaga* and the smaller rectangular hut used as a store or a fowl pen, *akabaga*. It is interesting to note that there is no special word for roof in Kinyakyusa. This part of the hut or house is simply called "the above" (*iyuru*). In contrast to this fact the different poles of the roof-structure are specially named according to their position parallel to or at right angels to the ridge of the rectangular houses. *Ukutalike* means to bind the different rafters of the roof together; *imbanda* is the name for the supporting poles of the roof, and *isyenga* for the poles of the framework of the walls.

15. Outfit. Inside the house we find besides the bedsteads (*ikitara*, pl. *(i)tara*) and the household utensils, the grinding-mill (*uruwara*), consisting of an upper (smaller) and a lower (broader) stone. The flour falls into a basket placed in front of the mill. Sometimes in a corner of the hut a nest (*ikitero*) for a sitting hen on top of a pole is to be found. Outside the house is a place for the sweepings (*urutagililo*). The cleaning of the interior of the houses and also the repairing of the mud plaster is the task of the women, but I saw men cleaning the space in front of the huts. At any case, it must be acknowledged that the cleanliness of a Nyakyusa village leaves little to be desired.

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343 Also the stables I saw were very clean; their length is adjusted to the number of cattle which are sheltered therein. Sometimes a wooden hoop is to be found in such a stable, hanging down from the ceiling. [251] The inside of the hoop is filled with a wicker-work whose meshes are dense enough to hold fruits to be dried. If such a hoop is hanging in the stable being out of use, a bag made of leaves containing pumpkin seeds *(inyugu)* for later planting may be fastened to it, and on the beams of 233 the framework of the wall: you may find a plaited leather neckband *(ulukoba)* for cows destined to hold a cow's bell *(ibengala)*. The sound of the bells of the cattle gave already great delight to the first European visitors of Nyakyusa and Ngonde Land, as we can read with Fotheringham (p. 24): "It is a pretty sight to see the herd coming into villages in the evening, and pleasant to hear the tinkle of the bells which are suspended from their necks, recalling in homely quietude the peaceful scenes of the Swiss."

184 The daily life of the Nyakyusa differs more or less among the
101 different ethnic groups which in former times had been independent units. Nowadays, however, all those groups who have similar speech and customs and share, therefore, a progressing common culture, only distinguished by minor local peculiarities, are called by the common name "Nyakyusa" (Cf. G. Wilson: An Introduction to Nyakyusa Society. Bantu Studies, Vol. X, 1936, p. 254 f).

Synopsis

090 Verfasser beschreibt in diesem zweiten Bericht die verschiedenen Arbeiten aus dem Alltagsleben der Nyakyusa. Die Betreuung der großen Rinderherden, einschließlich des Melkens, ist Männersache, die Frauen reinigen nur die Ställe. Die Männer bebauen die Felder, die Frauen säen, reinigen, ernten und bereiten alle Nahrung zu. Diese Arbeitsteilung fand Verfasser 1934 noch unangetastet, dagegen waren die zahlreichen mit Saat und Ernte verbundenen Zeremonien durch den europäischen Einfluß fast verschwunden. Ebenso war der Verfall der traditionellen Künste und Handwerke weit fortgeschritten durch europäische Einwirkungen wie durch die überall verstreuten indischen Händler als Vermittler der ausländischen Waren. Diese hatten auch die traditionelle Kleidung abgewandelt (als die Europäer kamen, gingen die Eingeborenen noch überwiegend nackt). Die alten geometrischen Muster, die äußere Hüttenwände und Türen schmückten, waren zum Teil mit Zeichnungen von Fahrrädern, Autos, Flugzeugen u.a. durchsetzt. Während früher auch das Alltagsleben der Nyakyusa in deren verschiedenen ethnischen Gruppen deutliche Unterschiede aufwies, sind diese ehemals unabhängigen Einheiten unter den europäischen Einwirkungen mehr und mehr kulturell zusammengewachsen.

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121 **THEORETICAL ORIENTATION**--research aims and objectives (e.g., complete ethnographic description, study of a particular institution or culture complex, testing of a theoretical hypothesis); general theoretical approach (e.g., historical, functional, psychological); formulation of research program; reasons for choice of particular field site; etc. See also: General information about the author 110

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Fox-Strangways; the late Mr. Eustace of the Tanganyika Agricultural Department, and Mrs. Eustace; the Rev. and Mrs. Marx of the Moravian mission at Rungwe; the Rev. and Mrs. Faulds of the Church of Scotland mission at Karonga; the Rev. and Mrs. Galbraith of Livingstonia; Mr. Godfried Schuler, a planter, and his wife; and the Officers of the King's African Rifles then stationed at Mbeya.

When planning work among the Nyakyusa, we were guided by Lord Lugard, who had lively recollections of 'the north-enders', and by the Rev. D. R. and Mrs. MacKenzie, missionaries of the Church of Scotland in the area for many years. Mr. MacKenzie had published *The Spirit-Ridden Konde* in 1925, and was deeply interested in the Nyakyusa-Ngonde people; he lent us manuscript notes on the language and gave us the most generous encouragement.

Godfrey Wilson was concerned to make a general sociological study of the Nyakyusa, while I had been commissioned by the International African Institute to study particularly the effects of Christian missions on the community; in practice we found it profitable each to work primarily with our own sex, though we did not do so exclusively. Nyakyusa men proved better informants than women, largely, we think, because the men all had a training in logic, gained in discussion in the villages and in court. Women lacked this training and, except for doctors and those who had had some schooling, they found it difficult to give an account of their customs. The pagan women were markedly less coherent than conservative Pondo women (among whom I had previously worked[1]), a difference which I attribute to the narrow scope for leadership among the women in the traditional Nyakyusa society. And the difference between conservative pagan Nyakyusa women (doctors excepted) and Christians who had had some schooling was very noticeable.

Material on pagan and Christian, as well as that on men and women, overlapped at every point; and shortly after leaving the field we agreed that to describe pagan and Christian groups separately would distort the facts very seriously, and that we would collaborate in writing three books on Nyakyusa kinship, Nyakyusa villages, and Nyakyusa chiefdoms, including in each of

[1] Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa* (1936).

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chiefs and the Administration, and between Nyakyusa workers and their employers, falls outside the scope of this book.

a. *The subject of study*

Nyakyusa society may be viewed as three circles of relationship —the relationships of kinship, village relationships, and relationships within and beyond the chiefdoms. This book is concerned with the second of these circles, that found within and between villages. Such relationships are not fully intelligible apart from the relationships of kinship and of the chiefdom, but a measure of abstraction is necessary—it is not possible to talk about everything at once. A sketch of kinship relationships has already been published;[1] a full account of them and of the relationships of chiefdoms has been planned; and the general theoretical approach has been set forth in *The Analysis of Social Change*[2] and in a paper entitled *Some Possibilities and Limitations of Anthropological Research*.[3]

The fundamental question we pose is *why age-villages?* Why should the Nyakyusa differ from all their neighbours of whom we have knowledge in the form of their villages? Why should they live with contemporaries, rather than kinsmen? The attempt to answer this leads us to discuss the characteristics of Nyakyusa society, which can be shown to be associated with the age-village organization, so that we can reformulate the question thus: *What are the peculiarities of Nyakyusa society not found in neighbouring societies with kinship villages?* We know too little about the neighbouring societies to answer this question fully, but some indication of the Nyakyusa peculiarities is given, and an analysis of these compels us to consider the relation between Nyakyusa values and social structure.

[1] Monica Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Kinship' in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, edited by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Daryll Forde, 1950.
[2] G. and M. Wilson, 1945.
[3] Monica Wilson, 1948.

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mediate ancestors of the participants, and another set which concern chiefdoms and groups of chiefdoms, and are directed towards the immediate ancestors of ruling chiefs and certain distant ancestors of the chiefs' line, heroes in Nyakyusa history. The name of one of these heroes, Kyala, has been used by the missionaries to translate the word 'God', but all the evidence available goes to show that Kyala was, traditionally, but one of several distant ancestors to whom regular sacrifices were made on behalf of a large group of chiefdoms. All the rituals of this type—those directed to family shades, the chiefs' ancestors, and the heroes—are concerned with that which is beneath (*pasi*), not that which is above. Men look to the earth where corpses are buried, not to any sky god.

The theme of the present volume is the rituals celebrated by kinsmen at death, at the puberty and marriage of a girl (the last two events usually coinciding), at birth, especially twin birth, and in misfortune. A further volume will deal with the communal rituals celebrated before the annual break of the rains; whenever public misfortune such as drought, flood, famine, or plague occurs or threatens; before battle; and when a chief is succeeded by his sons, and the younger generation take over power from their elders. There is no circumcision or initiation of men other than the 'coming out' ceremony, when a whole generation takes over responsibility for the administration and defence of the chiefdom from their fathers. Some reference to three of the heroes—Kyala, Lwembe, and Mbasi—is made in texts on the rituals of kinsmen, but our discussion of them is postponed to the second book in which the rituals directed to them are described.

A section of the Nyakyusa people is Christian and its influence on pagan thought and practice is appreciable; however, discussion of this is also postponed to the second book, since it is most evident in the changing concept of Kyala. There, too, the connections between change in ritual and other aspects of the social structure between 1934 and 1955 are analysed.

The Nyakyusa cult of senior relatives (like any ancestor cult) is not intelligible or significant apart from a study of kinship, and it may be argued that this material should be presented only as part of an analysis of Nyakyusa kinship, but we cannot discuss everything at once and some measure of abstraction is necessary. No one ritual among the Nyakyusa is fully intelligible without reference to the whole series of rituals. The principle, propounded forty-five years ago by Professor Radcliffe-Brown, that a symbol

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recurring in a cycle of rituals is likely to have the same significance in each, holds good for the Nyakyusa: certain symbols of shaving, washing, eating, spreading banana leaves, scattering grain, and so forth were similarly interpreted by our informants in the different rituals of the cycle, and their full significance is only apparent when a comparison of their various uses is made. In this book, therefore, attention is focused on the ritual cycle. A comparison of numerous rites reveals a *symbolic pattern*, the counterpart, in the emotional aspect, of kinship organization in the practical aspect; and the comments of the more self-conscious Nyakyusa on the rites indicate the *intellectual system* linked with this pattern.

As already mentioned, the religious conceptions of the Nyakyusa include the belief in medicines, in 'the breath of men', and in witchcraft, as well as in the power of senior relatives. The importance of medicines in the rituals directed to the shades will be evident in every chapter of this book. References to witchcraft and the 'breath of men' are not so frequent, since these form what is on the whole a separate system of beliefs, and refer to a different set of relationships. The ancestor cult is concerned *solely* with the relationships of kinsmen, and of the chiefs and their peoples; witchcraft and 'the breath of men' *mainly* with the relationships of fellow villagers—i.e. age mates and their wives—though it also impinges on kinship and political relationships. Only in the relationship of spouses, and that between chief and village headmen, do the two sets of beliefs constantly overlap. An account of the Nyakyusa conception of witchcraft and 'the breath of men' has already been published, and it has been shown that accusations of witchcraft occur most frequently between fellow villagers and, nowadays, between fellow employees, that is, between non-relatives; they are also fairly frequently directed against wives and co-wives; but accusations of witchcraft against kinsmen of the same lineage are very rare.[1] Antagonism between kinsmen occurs and is expressed in accusations of practising sorcery, as well as in fear of the power of senior relatives, but most misfortunes are attributed to the lust and envy of neighbours or wives rather than to the malice of kinsmen. Evil is conceived of as having a personal cause, but as originating generally outside the circle of kin. The mystical power of senior relatives (living and dead) can never be used irresponsibly—it cannot operate unless the cause is just—and therefore misfortune emanating from the shades is always a just

[1] Monica Wilson, *Good Company*, pp. 100–4; 198–205.

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771 retribution, not an irresponsible assault, like that made by witches.

The religion of the Nyakyusa is expressed in ritual rather than in dogma. Everyone participates, at some time or another, in a variety of rituals; a great deal of time and energy is devoted to them, and they are elaborate. By comparison, the dogma and myth are limited both in content and in influence. Many more people participate in rituals than are fully conscious of dogma and myth; many more people can describe rituals than interpret them. In this analysis, therefore, the rituals are first described and the principal dogmas are deduced from the Nyakyusa interpretation of them.

121 771 The stress is on the Nyakyusa interpretation of their own rituals, for anthropological literature is bespattered with symbolic guessing, the ethnographer's interpretation of the rituals of other people. Now it seems probable that certain symbols are universal in the sense that they express the same ideas in all societies. Many other symbols are emotionally intelligible when interpreted—the following pages are full of examples—but it is foolish to imagine that an individual schooled in one culture can understand the symbolism of another without instruction. For this reason, and at the risk of wearying the reader, many of the texts on which this interpretation is based are quoted. The interpretations of even the most self-conscious Nyakyusa, such as Kasitile the rain-maker, Mwandisi the old blind historian, Mwasalemba, Lyandileko and Kakune the doctors, do not, of course, reveal the whole truth about Nyakyusa rituals, but *any analysis not based on some translation of the symbols used* by people of that culture is open to suspicion. The texts were recorded in the Nyakyusa language by Godfrey or Monica Wilson, or one of our two Nyakyusa clerks, Mwaikambo and Mwaisumo, and the informants most often quoted were selected for their special knowledge. And very many others discussed rituals with us.[1]

Not all Nyakyusa are conscious of all the interpretations given. A few symbols, such as the association of different types of banana with male and female respectively, are known to everyone; but the meaning of many of the events in the rituals was obscure to young men and women. Most of the interpretations quoted have, however, been given by more than one informant (as is shown in the text and documents) and may be taken as *common*, i.e. current in

[1] For the methods of field-work cf. Monica Wilson, *Good Company*, pp. vii-ix.

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the group. In the few cases in which our informant may have been giving his own individual interpretation, 'putting a bucket down into his subconscious and pulling it up', it was at least a Nyakyusa subconscious, and the interpretation is in terms of the culture. It is with common, not individual, symbols that we are concerned: what is offered in this book is a sociological, not a psychological, analysis.

Similarities between the symbolism of Nyakyusa rituals and the symbolism of dreams and neuroses in Western society will be obvious to readers. That preoccupation with anal and oral functions, with 'nakedness' (though the Nyakyusa habitually wore the most exiguous of coverings), with death, coition, and birth, with mastery ('overstepping') and incest, which is characteristic of the rituals we describe, is evident also in any textbook of psychoanalysis dealing with Western Europeans and Americans; and certain symbols such as a house, a doorway, a spear, seed, and so forth are common to both cultures; but here we are not concerned to trace these similarities. Our business is to lay bare the symbolic pattern of the Nyakyusa without reference to the Western tradition.

The material used for the sociological analysis of ritual consists of two types: observation or description of events, and statements about associations. The greatest difficulty in presenting it has been to choose between a chronological account of each ritual, followed by the Nyakyusa translation or interpretation of the symbolism, and then by the sociological analysis; and an integrated account combining the interpretation and analysis with the description. The advantage of the first method is that the validity of both interpretation and analysis can be more easily judged since the evidence on which it is based is fully set out; the disadvantage is that the description itself implies interpretation and analysis. The symbolism is often implicit in the description of events, and the separation of description from interpretation involves repetition; at the same time the classification of events and symbols is itself a form of analysis, and the separation of description from analysis tends to conceal this. The present study is a compromise between the two approaches. Where events and their symbolism are fairly straightforward, the interpretation accompanies the description; but where, as in the rituals of farewell to the dead, puberty and marriage, and abnormal birth, they are complicated, and the interpretation may well be questioned, accounts of the events are separated from detailed evidence on symbolism. Analysis is neces-

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121 128 tacitly implied all through, but since the argument can only be unfolded step by step (for no one ritual can be fully analysed until all are described) a discussion of it is reserved to the concluding chapters. In interpreting the symbolism, cross reference between the different rituals of the cycles would be too frequent to give in the text. Readers wishing to follow up references to the symbolism of bananas, for example, or *ikipiki* medicine, should use the index.

771 577 The link between religious beliefs and morality (in the sense of right behaviour) is very clear among the Nyakyusa. Many misfortunes are attributed to sin, that is, wrong-doings (*mweene*) thought to be supernaturally punished. Indeed, to the Nyakyusa the idea of the wicked man 'spreading himself like a green bay tree'[1] is inconceivable, and the disciples' question: 'Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'[2] cold common sense. Here we are concerned with the form of morality[3] sanctioned by Nyakyusa religion, with the conception of good and evil, and with [128] the relation between belief and behaviour.[4] A table of private misfortunes attributed to the anger of senior relatives is included in this volume; public misfortunes will be discussed in the succeeding one; and a table of misfortunes attributed to witchcraft, sorcery, and the legitimate anger of neighbours ('the breath of men') has been given in the study of Nyakyusa age-villages already published.[5] While the Nyakyusa lay great emphasis on the correct performance, in every detail, of certain rituals, their very performance implies co-operation between kinsmen, and not only co-operation but amity. For 'anger in the heart', if unconfessed, may bring misfortune. Thus though the outward form is stressed, the inward and spiritual is not totally ignored.

121 We proceed on the assumption that men express in ritual what moves them most; that the form of expression is conventional and obligatory, and that therefore in ritual the values of a group (as opposed to those of individuals) are revealed.

[1] Psalm xxxvii: 35. [2] John ix, 2.

[3] I cannot accept Professor Radcliffe-Brown's definition of morality as the control of conduct by 'public opinion and conscience' as opposed to control by religion. Nor do I accept Professor Macbeath's argument that primitive man has an idea of good quite apart from religion. A. E. Taylor's view of morality comes much closer to the facts as shown in Nyakyusa society.

cf. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, p. 171; A. Macbeath, *Experiments in Living*, Gifford Lectures 1948-9; A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, Gifford Lectures 1926-8.

[4] The germ of the book is Godfrey Wilson's 'An African morality', *Africa*, 1936.

[5] Monica Wilson, *Good Company*, pp. 198-213.

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By *ritual* we mean a primarily religious action, that is, action directed to securing the blessing of some mystical power or powers. The action may be a negative, i.e. an avoidance or taboo, as well as a positive one. Symbols and concepts are employed in rituals but are subordinated to practical ends. Ritual is distinguished from *ceremonial*, which is an elaborate conventional form for the expression of feeling, not confined to religious occasions; any emotional situation, whether religious or secular, may be clothed in ceremony, and a ceremony is not enforced by mystical sanctions, only by conventional ones. In short, a ceremony is an appropriate and elaborate form for the expression of feeling; but a ritual is action believed to be efficacious.[1] Confusion between the two arises in our own society, for what is ritual to some (e.g. a rite of baptism or marriage) is but ceremonial to others. In Nyakyusa society the distinction is fairly clear-cut: *ubusyago*, which is translated here as *a ritual*, means a series of actions directed towards the shades or heroes, and enforced by mystical sanctions, as opposed to action which is merely customary and conventional (*ulusiko*). At a burial, some actions are only *ulusiko*, others are also *ubusyago*. A negative ritual, that which is taboo, is *nsiko*.

Ubusyago is applied as a noun, and in its verbal form, *ukusyagula* (to perform a ritual), to funeral rites, especially that part of such rites in which only immediate relatives participate (*ubusyago bwa bafyele*); to the girls' puberty and marriage ritual (*ubusyago bwa bwinga*), to the ritual at birth (*ubusyago bwa bafiwe*), especially at twin birth (*ubusyago bwa mapasa*); to the rituals performed on behalf of the country for rain and fertility (*ubusyago bwa kisi*); to the treatment of the young chief and village headmen when authority is handed to them by the older generation (*ubusyago bwa bwaka*); and, nowadays, to the sacraments of the Christian Church. *Usyago* is the specialist who knows the right medicines and observances and conducts the ritual. The word is translated as 'officiant' or 'priest'.

By a *symbol* is meant something which typifies or represents something else. Our Nyakyusa informants spoke of *ififwani*—likenesses (the word is also used for photographs)—and in expounding rituals they repeatedly said of an object or action: 'This means (*kukuti*) such and such.' Symbolism is always based on an association, a feeling of likeness between things. The intrinsic quality of an object, or relationship, or event, is expressed in terms of another

[1] cf. Godfrey Wilson, 'Nyakyusa conventions of Burial', *Bantu Studies*, 1939.

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121 811 object or action which it is felt to resemble. The images men use, the things they feel to be alike, are determined in a general way by the form of the society, and Nyakyusa images are in terms of bananas, staple grains, cattle, smithing on a primitive forge, lineage organization and so on. There are cultural idioms, accepted forms of expression, which frequently recur, but the particular associations are not predictable any more than the associations made by a poet in our own society—the priest and the doctor are indeed in one aspect poets.

771 813 843 The essence of Nyakyusa ritual is that things which are felt to be alike are taken as causally connected. Both positive actions and avoidances or taboos are based on the assumption that like objects or actions react on one another. This was clearly recognized by an informant who remarked: 'avoidances come from resemblances.' The basis is invariably the *feeling* of likeness, but mixed up with this there is often exact observation, as in the following taboo. The husband of a pregnant woman may not hunt big game because, it is said, they will be unusually fierce and attack him particularly. The association made is between a pregnant woman who is irritable, 'fierce' (*ukali*), and the game which is fierce. The husband is identified with his wife, 'and', the Nyakyusa say, 'lion *always* attack a cow in calf'. Sometimes like things are felt to be antagonistic, as 'seed in the belly' and seed in the ground, and sometimes sympathetic. Sometimes like is thought to produce like—a pregnant woman is forbidden to sit close to someone lest she bears twins—and sometimes men mime a misfortune as a prophylactic against it.

789 184 771 The rituals are magical in the sense that efficacy is held to lie in the particular material form,[1] but they vary in detail with the cultural group, just as the language does.[2] The rituals of the Lakeshore plain in Tanganyika (MuNgonde) and of Selya are almost identical, but those of the Kukwe, the Lugulu, the Saku, the Ndali, the Penja, and the people of Ngonde in Nyasaland are all somewhat different. Differences in ritual are directly connected by the people themselves with differences in lineage, and the principle is maintained that every individual follows the ritual of his or her father's lineage, though a married woman will follow that of her

[1] For a discussion of this characteristic of magic cf. G. & M. Wilson, *The Analysis of Social Change* (1945), pp. 72–3; 88–95.

[2] An account of the various cultural groups included under Nyakyusa, and of related peoples, is given in *Good Company*, pp. 1–5.

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182 affirmative and cathartic: they express certain attitudes and make explicit and reject others. But how far the catharsis is efficient, how far the rituals cleanse man of anti-social attitudes, we do not know. In many religions there is liable to be a gap between attitudes expressed in ritual and everyday behaviour: between the rejection of anger, hate, envy, and neglect in the ritual, and brotherly co-operation between the worshippers in secular affairs. A pagan Nyakyusa may share the sacrificial flesh with his brother but quarrel over cattle and work sorcery against him; just as we white South Africans may take Communion with a fellow Christian who is black, yet compel him to live in squalor far separate from us; but the very reluctance of most whites in South Africa to take Communion along with blacks is evidence that the symbolic act is not without significance.

(c) *Ultimate values and cultural variation*

●121 There are certain general hypotheses about the nature of ritual in society, which the analysis of Nyakyusa rituals and comparison with other societies suggest.[1]

First, those things are treated as sacred which are necessary to the survival of the group. In every society we find the *means of subsistence* sacralized (whether it be crops, cattle, hunting, or fishing, or a combination of these) together with fire and shelter. The reproductive cycle is always treated as sacred, the primary relationships of parents and children and siblings, the group or community as a whole, and significant changes in status within it. Law is holy in the sense that right behaviour (or morality) is always linked to religion.

As economy and social structure vary, the particular items treated as sacred vary. This is clearly recognized by the Nyakyusa themselves, as the texts quoted show: the foods used in the rituals are commonly the staple foods of the local area. And if a number of Bantu-speaking groups are compared it is plain that the location of the altar varies with the economy. Among the Nyakyusa it is the earth of the banana grove; among the pastoral Nguni it is the cattle byre; among Lunda hunters it is a tree or branch adorned with trophies of the chase.[2] The exception is when rituals

[1] My debt to Professor Radcliffe-Brown will be obvious to all students of anthropology.

[2] V. W. Turner, 'Lunda Rites and Ceremonies', *Occasional Papers of the Rhodes-Livingstone Museum*, No. 10, 1953.

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spread and the foods and altars traditional in them continue to be used: thus Nyakyusa Christians use wheaten bread and wine from the grape, whereas their pagan neighbours use bananas and millet beer, and their altar is a table set at the east end of a consecrated building, not the earth of a banana grove.

Nyakyusa ideas of physiology are those of a strongly patrilineal society, in marked contrast with those of the Bemba who are matrilineal:[1] to the Nyakyusa a woman is a 'bag' which the husband fills with his 'blood' and so creates a child, while the Bemba believe that 'blood' is passed through the woman, not the man. The taboos of pregnancy also have a patrilineal slant. A difficult labour is commonly attributed, among the Nyakyusa, to the wife's adultery, never to that of her husband, as among the Bemba.

Differences in ritual vary in general form with the differences in economy and structure, but there remains a relative autonomy between them. Not only do symbols spread beyond the economy within which they were coined but, as we showed earlier, poetic licence exists, and the particular associations made by priest and poet are not predictable. Ritual idioms are linked to language, but how closely we do not know. What evidence there is from Bantu Africa suggests a similarity in symbols over a wide area, connected with the similarity in language, but such a hypothesis has yet to be established.

Secondly, the expression of sentiments reaffirms them. Treating food, and reproduction, and family relationships, and the community as sacred, expresses the importance of these things to the group concerned, and at the same time breeds respect for them. Treating them as important in ritual makes people feel that they are important. In Whitehead's phrase, 'the object of symbolism is the enhancement of the importance of what is symbolized'.[2] Rituals are also cathartic in that they express and explicitly reject anti-social attitudes, such as anger, terror, and the wish for death.

Thirdly, the general attitudes expressed in Nyakyusa rituals are necessary to the continuance of any society; they are conditions of social living; and the particular attitudes are necessary to the maintenance of the particular Nyakyusa structure.

Every society, if it is to survive, must value fertility in some

[1] A. I. Richards, 'Some types of family structure amongst the Central Bantu' in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, edited by Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, p. 207; 'Mother-right among the Central Bantu' in *Essays Presented to C. G. Seligman*, edited by Evans-Pritchard, Firth, Malinowski, Schapera, p. 276.

[2] A. N. Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1923), p. 74.

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121 142 degree. Sir Charles Darwin has suggested that those societies which put a premium on fertility will ultimately be dominant, by the weight of numbers,[1] but the evidence from Africa suggests that those societies which have in fact survived have regulated reproduction. Of the concern of the Nyakyusa with fertility there can be no doubt. The gods *are* the reproductive principle expressed in the idiom of a patrilineal society—'the shade and the women are brothers'. One of the express purposes of the rituals of kinship, as well as of the communal rituals, is to secure fertility; one of the major sanctions of religion is the fear of the loss of it. And further than this, all their major activities are expressed in terms of the reproductive cycle and thought to be linked to it. The association of crops, and cattle, and hunting, and war with pregnancy and menstruation in women has already been indicated, and a more general connection between fertility in crops, and cattle, and men will be shown in the account of communal rituals. The two principal crafts, iron smelting and bark-cloth making, are associated with the act of coition. So also are fire-making, grinding, cooking, and eating; and the hearth and hut are identified with the union of husband and wife, and with childbirth. Whether such a preoccupation with fecundity, and the tendency to express all activities in terms of the reproductive cycle, are stronger among the Nyakyusa than among most other peoples we do not yet know, but at least they do not minimize its importance. It is the more significant therefore that, though maximum fertility of soil and stock was sought, there was a limitation of the human reproductive rate by deliberate spacing, and by limiting a woman's period of child-bearing to the years before her son's marriage. The Nyakyusa appear to have been an expanding people in relatively empty country, and the six or seven births per woman which this system allowed, combined with an infant mortality of perhaps 30 per cent, did not cause undue pressure upon their resources.

121 182 The particular form of limitation was linked to the structure of age-villages. The very wide spacing, with four to five years between pregnancies, and the taboo on a woman bearing after the marriage of her eldest son, ensured that, as a general rule, full brothers built in different villages. Thus the most closely-knit kinship group, that of full brothers and their sons, did not coincide with the local group, and the fissiparous tendency of lineages was checked by village loyalties. A group of full brothers and their

[1] Charles Darwin, *The Next Million Years*, p. 171 *et passim*.

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sons, between whom economic and religious bonds were strong, might be liable to isolate themselves, but could not do so when each brother and son lived in a different village. As among the northern Nguni and Tswana, who were organized in age regiments,[1] the principle of generation balanced the lineage principle, each holding the other in check.

Every society values co-operation: 'mutual aid' of one sort or another is a condition of social survival. The Nyakyusa rituals of kinship constantly reaffirm the mutual dependence of members of a lineage. They are 'members of one another' by virtue of their common blood, and what injures one may injure all. This is very clearly expressed in the rituals of death, twin birth, spearing, rotting the ropes, and protection against sorcery. The desire for health and plenty is the lever used to compel co-operation.

The elementary family of parents and children exists in every society of which we have evidence and may be taken as an institution necessary to survival, biological and social, though its form varies. In the death, and puberty, and birth rituals the close character of the bonds between parents and children, between siblings, and between spouses, is expressed; and the polygynous form of the Nyakyusa family, the closer bonds between a man and his first wife and those of the same 'house', and the identification of alternate generations, are also manifested. Thus the importance of the primary ties of parents and children, and of the 'house' within the polygynous family, is enhanced.

Differences in status exist in every society and must do so since leadership is necessary. Individuals move from one position to another during the course of their lives, and all societies celebrate such changes, thereby compelling public acceptance of them, and impressing on the individuals concerned their new duties and responsibilities. These are expressed very pointedly in the Nyakyusa admonition to a bride, or widow, or the mother of twins; in the greeting accorded to the heir to the father of a family; and in the oration to the shade. The rituals are a symbolic weaning from childhood, from the bride's father's lineage, from a former marriage, or from deceased parents, and compel acceptance of a new position; clinging to the old spells madness and death. The conception of being 'born again' and making a new start, is directly

[1] Among the Pedi it was taboo for full brothers to be initiated into the same regiment. G. M. Pitje, 'Traditional systems of male education among the Pedi', *African Studies*, 9 (1950), p. 109.

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121 linked to the physiological cycle of individuals and their close kin,
554 and cannot be detached from it as in Christianity.

121 Law is a condition of social survival; no society can exist with-
626 out it; and in so far as religion helps to maintain law and order it fulfills a necessary social function. Among the Nyakyusa (and perhaps in all societies) order is maintained partly by fear of supernatural sanctions. The rituals we have described both enhance fear and relieve it. They harness fear to social ends.

121 The preceding chapters are full of the pagan fear of death,
771 menstruation, childbirth, and shedding blood. The rituals express the fear and teach men what they must do to be saved. They teach them to co-operate with their kinsmen and to follow traditional custom, for in that alone does salvation lie. The fear of madness or sterility compels each generation to follow traditional custom as ordained for them by the heroes: thus is the dependence of man upon his society instilled. The death ritual illustrates this most dramatically. In every society men must overcome death emotionally, they must turn to life. In the death ritual the mourners are distraught, terrified; they express their grief and put it behind them; their relatives and neighbours gather round them, share their sorrow, and help them to overcome it. The dead is replaced. Death is associated with fecundity and so made tolerable. It is no accident that the Nyakyusa interpret all the rituals, and especially the death ritual, as a protection against going mad, against the disintegration of the personality. And safety is assured to the living by following minutely the traditions of their lineage.

[84] That the nature of men's fears is culturally determined is clear from the Nyakyusa evidence, for Christians and pagans alike are agreed that 'the Christians fear much less' than do pagans, and the Christians do in fact ignore taboos which the pagans feel to be binding. But the rituals do not create fear out of nothing. All the situations in which they are performed—birth and death, marriage, and misfortune—are situations of emotional tension in all societies. The rituals heighten the emotions and canalize them. They both teach men to feel, and teach them what it is proper to feel.

771 Many writers have shown us that the conception of sacred in-
783 cludes both the idea of holiness and of pollution;[1] that the awful, the fearful, may be conceived both as pure and as filthy. In

[1] See particularly W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889), pp. 153, 446–54 (1914 ed.); R. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (1923).

3: Mackenzie M-5 (ca. 1925) 1925
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Preface

THIS book is not an attempt to depict the daily life of the Konde people; it rather aims at indicating, so far as an outsider can, the leading ideas and practices which make up the background, leaving to others the task of bringing the foreground into proper relief. And, after many years' residence and work among the Konde, I feel increasingly how much the fact of being a foreigner among them limits one's understanding of the people whose ideas he attempts to set down on paper. The task has been undertaken largely at the request of some of the leading men of the tribe, who are alive to the fact that the old days are passing, even among the conservative Konde, and that, if a record is to be made at all, it must be made without delay.

There is no one to whom I must acknowledge debtedness to the same extent as I must, and now do, to native chiefs and common people, educated and otherwise; to doctors, diviners, hunters, fishers; every kind of native in fact, from whom I have caught hints, in sudden and unintentional flashes of revelation, or in sustained conversation, of what is in the Bantu mind. And therefore I have, in most chapters, aimed at using language which indicates the native attitude to the various beliefs dealt with; an attitude in most cases of unquestioning faith.

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THE RHODES-LIVINGSTONE PAPERS

121 This series is designed to increase the sum of exact information upon the sociology of Central Africa at that most interesting of all historical periods, the present day. The sudden establishment of relationships between the civilized peoples of Europe and the primitive peoples of Africa is one of the greatest events of human history; we are in the midst of it, and it makes upon us all, both Africans and Europeans, far-reaching demands for emotional and practical adjustment. Nor without understanding can we either control our destiny or properly enjoy its rich complexity.

Understanding, however, is hard to come by in the bewildering diversity of facts. Human society is everywhere complex and especially so in Central Africa where the variety of cultural tradition, both amongst Africans and Europeans, and of local economic and climatic conditions prevents our minds from grasping at all easily the general nature and movement of the situation in which we live. We must needs proceed patiently and step by step. And so the majority of these papers will deal each with one limited area and one particular aspect of social life alone. Only in this piecemeal fashion can we ever reach true understanding.

In this, the first of the series, an attempt is made to describe the property in land which individual Africans possess to-day within a particular tribal group in the south-west of Tanganyika. As this group was until fifty years ago among the most isolated and primitive groups in the whole of Africa, there is perhaps a more than local interest in seeing that it ranks unquestionably among those "indigenous peoples," to quote a famous judicial document, "whose legal conceptions, though differently developed, are hardly less precise than our own. When once they have been studied and understood they are no less enforceable than rights arising under English law."

GODFREY WILSON,
Director, Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.

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1. *INTRODUCTION*

Land everywhere is the basis of social life, that upon which men move and rest; it is both in itself the most important raw material of economic activity and the location of all other materials such as minerals, wood and water; it is a universal condition of human action, an object of human understanding and feeling. And everywhere the use of land is defined and limited by a system of tenure, a series of laws, moral rules and conventions without which no orderly life at all would be possible upon it. This paper is an attempt to describe in part one such system of land tenure, that which I found to obtain among the Nyakyusa, a Bantu people of South Tanganyika, during the years 1934-1938. 121

I have here described in detail the land-rights of individuals only, both in relation to one another and to the villages and chiefdoms of which they are members, and have left the rights of these groups in relation to one another for a further publication.

The Nyakyusa system of land-tenure is determined by three main factors: firstly by the physical conditions of life in this part of Central Africa, that is by the nature of the soil and its topography, by the climate and by the density of the human population; secondly by the particular practical uses to which land is put and the techniques employed therein; and thirdly by the form of Nyakyusa society, the groups and relationships into which it is articulated. But in considering these three main determinants we shall have to take into account intellectual and emotional factors also, the understanding of their land which the Nyakyusa possess and their feelings about it.

2. *PHYSICAL CONDITIONS*

The Rungwe District of the Southern Highlands Province of Tanganyika, in which the Nyakyusa live, is situated some 9° south of the Equator and is a part of the Great Rift Valley formation. The country of the Nyakyusa is bounded on the south by Lake Nyasa and the Songwe river, on the east by the almost sheer wall of the Livingstone Mountains (which rise to 10,000 feet), and on the west by the lower Ndali hills which, although included in the same administrative district, are inhabited not by Nyakyusa but by two cultural groups closely related to them, the Ndali and the Lambya. 131 133

The Nyakyusa live then between the two walls of the Rift, but their country is not itself all of an equal altitude. In the north the Rift is here interrupted and closed by the extinct Rungwe volcano (10,000 feet) from whose base (5,000 feet) the land drops for twenty-five miles in a cascade of hills and little plateaux to level out in a lake-shore plain fifteen or

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My wife and I were engaged in researches among the Nyakyusa from September 1934 to January 1938; and our informants constantly told us of the general similarity between their own customs and those of the Ngonde plain. They made it clear, however, that while they and the men of the Ngonde plain shared an otherwise almost identical culture they yet differed markedly in their political systems. The Nyakyusa, when the Europeans reached them, were organized in small independent chiefdoms, the people of Ngonde possessed a paramount chief, the Kyungu. More recently, among the Nyakyusa, a sustained attempt by the Tanganyika Administration to set up two paramount chiefs had failed; in Ngonde, on the other hand, where the Kyungu's supremacy had, until recently, been officially unrecognized by the Nyasaland Administration, his position seemed to be quite secure. The contrast was an interesting one and demanded investigation. Nor was this the only difference between the Nyakyusa political system and that of Ngonde; besides a paramount chief Ngonde possessed a group of hereditary nobles (*amahambala*) which was apparently quite unparalleled among the Nyakyusa.

So in July 1937 we crossed the Songwe and spent some time in Ngonde studying these differences. Our visit confirmed the fact that the traditional culture and social system of the Ngonde plain was in almost all respects identical with that of the Nyakyusa. The patrilineal kinship organization with marriage by cattle, the age-villages each with its great-commoner or headman (*ulifumu*), the little chiefdoms each consisting of a group of age-villages united under a hereditary chief (*umalafyale*), all were there.[1] The descriptions we were given of the traditional rituals at death, at girls' puberty, at the birth of twins and at the "coming out" of young chiefs seemed to be identical in general significance and almost identical in detail with the rituals we knew among the Nyakyusa. Language also was similar, though here the similarity had been less close in former times. And yet there were the two great differences: at the apex of the political system of Ngonde was the Kyungu, while a group of hereditary nobles formed an integral part of it. Again and again our informants confirmed this general identity, these specific differences: "Everything is just the same among us as among the Nyakyusa, only in the case of the Kyungu and his nobles (*amahambala*) is there any dissimilarity." How then was this dissimilarity to be accounted for?

[1] This social system is discussed in the first paper of this series—*The Land Rights of Individuals among the Nyakyusa* (1938), and also in papers contributed to *Bantu Studies*, one in September 1936—"An Introduction to Nyakyusa Society," another in April 1939—"Nyakyusa Burial Conventions."

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AN INTRODUCTION TO NYAKYUSA SOCIETY

By GODFREY WILSON

128 This paper is an attempt to give an outline of the pagan culture of the Nyakyusa people of South Tanganyika[1] in relation to the three fundamental groups into which their society is articulated—the family, the age-village and the chiefdom. Every Nyakyusa belongs to some family, to some age-village, to some chiefdom; and in his membership of these three groups is comprehended most of his behaviour.

●121 Sociology is the objective study of human relationships which, as they only exist in men's activities, can only there be studied. The systematic investigation of culture, of the common economic, ceremonial, legal, religious and other activities which obtain among some group of people, is the sole possible method of discovering the system of human relationships which makes of the group a society. It is only by viewing all the facts of culture in the light of the relationships of the people concerned that we can see the full objective significance of those facts, it is only so that we can see the body or actuality of those relationships. For human relationships are the most inclusive facts of social life, they are the form[2] which the sociologist seeks for in the matter of his special field; whether he is engaged in description, or in the functional analysis of a single culture, or in the comparative analysis of several cultures, human relationships are always his goal, which he must reach if his account of fact is to be coherent, if his explanations are to be complete.

The method adopted in this paper is that of Professor Malinowski and his followers; it involves a repudiation of the one-sided Durkheimian concept of "social integration" or "solidarity," and a realization that culture, consisting as it does of human behaviour with a human meaning, has a material reality which makes possible and conditions the human relationships that integrate it and give it form. This point is elaborated in the concluding section.

128 In order to make Nyakyusa society into a wholly lucid unit, intelligibly comparable with other societies, it would be necessary to undertake a complete functional analysis, and to explain in detail why it is that different members of this group on different occasions generally conform,

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[1] I am greatly indebted to the Rockefeller Foundation for the Fellowship which makes my investigation possible.

[2] By "form" is meant, not a sensible pattern, but an intelligible system of fact.

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And. 622
every year two hereditary Kinga priests come a three days journey from 782
their own country to participate in the sacrifice of a black cow to the [674]
spirits of Lwembe and his descendants.

Down by Lake Nyasa, in the extreme South East of the Nyakyusa 778
district, there is another equally sacred spot where sacrifices were, and 1764
believe still are[21] made to Kyala, a younger brother of Lwembe.

The Christians and the Moslems form other religious groups which 795
transcend the boundaries of a single chiefdom, but an examination of the Nyakyusa Christian and Moslem communities is beyond the scope of this paper.

The political group which is constituted by a Court district, though 636
only ten years old, is of great importance in Nyakyusa society; but here again the detailed examination of its organization and the relationships of its members is beyond the scope of this paper.

Conclusion: Culture and Society

The aim of sociology is to describe single forms of society fully and, 121
in comparison with one another, to explain them completely, in so far as 128
reasons can be found within this particular scientific field. Neither full description nor complete explanation of Nyakyusa society has here been attempted: many important facts have been omitted from the account, irregularities of detail have been slurred over, the connections of fact have been only occasionally and sketchily established, and no systematic comparison of this unit with others has been made at all.

But the method of this paper has involved an analysis, summary and 121
general though it has been, of the nature of some of the many institutions in which the Nyakyusa meet, of some of the actual elements in their relationships with one another. It is in their dealings with the earth and their cattle, with the spirits and with men who break the law, in their discussions and arguments, their ceremonial feasts, their giving and receiving, in their loves and hates and in their admiration and mockery of one another that they forever make and remake their own human relationships.

Culture is the matter of which society is the form; inseparable in fact they are only intelligible together. No two men can be related unless they both do something and unless their activities are somehow connected. Nor can either escape relationship with his fellow if what

[21] I have not yet been there to investigate.

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121 one does in any way affects the other's behaviour. "Culture" is but a general term for all the connected activities of a group of people through which they enter into relationships, that is into society, with one another. And since culture is nothing but the activities which bind men wittingly or unwittingly together, it is only through a systematic investigation of culture that we can reach any understanding at all of human bonds.

Every cultural activity must have some point, some meaning, for the actors themselves[22] or they would not undertake it; it must have some value, some emotional appeal, some intellectual significance for them. This meaning is not the sole reason for their behaviour but it is one among other reasons. And, as what they do is an occasion of relationship with one another, so the meaning of what they do is also one of the reasons for the existence of their society in that particular situation.

Now the specific meaning of a cultural activity to the actors is not always a direct interest in one another or in human relationships as such, although sometimes, as in love making or in a movement for social reform, it may be so. In their behaviour men commonly look to some non-social end and create society half unwittingly on the way. When the Nyakyusa sacrifice a cow to the spirits of dead chiefs, or hoe their fields, or drink, or discuss the cause of a sickness, the specific reasons for their behaviour are to be found in values, ideas and feelings connected with health, food, drink, sickness and misfortune in general; and it is, in large part, their concern with these things that leads them to enter into society with one another. Human relationships are largely determined by the consequences, implications, and associations of absorbing pursuits whose immediate interest is not social, they are only in part the specific ends of effort, the direct objects of thought and feeling.

But apart from men's actual pursuits society has no existence anywhere, it can only be found in the material events of culture, at particular places and times; and only through a systematic analysis of the meanings and implications of those events can society be understood.

What we have just said involves a radical criticism of the Durkheimian method in social science; for that method always stops short of any thorough analysis of the manifold meanings and implications of cultural institutions, and so can never reveal the true nature of society which only exists in them. The Durkheimian's "social integration" or "solidarity" is a system of human relationships with only emotional

[22] Not for all the actors, some of whom usually behave under the compulsion of sanctions, but for the majority of those responsible for the activity's continuance.

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elements, void of all intelligible occasions of existence, a bloodless fiction, an insignificant idea. 121

Since every cultural activity is in part determined by external conditions of biology, climate, geography and historical circumstance, these conditions are also partial determinants of the human relationships involved in it. But the values, opinions and emotions current in any society are very largely independent of external conditions and cannot be deduced from them. And it is these aims, ideas and feelings which, through the activities to which they give point, and through the consequences, associations and implications of these activities provide the cultural conditions for each particular form of human society.

Thus culture, the matter, conditions the form of society which exists in it; but the reverse is equally true, for every cultural activity is itself conditioned and made possible by the system of human relationships of which the society in question consists. Culture has no independent reality, it is always together with and at every moment conditioned by the relationships of people, for it is nothing but their connected behaviour. The form in which men act, in which they express their feelings and understand their world is inevitably and always conditioned by their relationships with one another. Into the meaning of cultural activities human relationships only occasionally enter as the immediate centre of the actors' interest, but they invariably enter as the context in which alone that meaning can exist. When a Nyakyusa hoes his fields he is directly seeking food and his action has thus an interest which is not at that moment specifically social, none the less it is socially conditioned in its entirety. The time and energy he puts into hoeing depend upon his need of food, which in turn largely depends upon the number of his wives and children, his responsibilities to them and the prestige that he has acquired or that he wishes to acquire for hospitality among his neighbours. And his every action, his every statement, his every overt expression of feeling is likewise socially conditioned.

A true sociological method is thus a systematic investigation of the mutual connections of culture and society, an attempt to show how the material and the form of social life forever condition each other. It is only in this way that we can reach understanding of the separate units of human society and of the universal laws which all alike fulfill.

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634 796 769 114 797 177 [643] [796] 121

accessible in an earlier book, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa*,[1] and the details need not be recapitulated here.

Perhaps the reader has already noted a certain difficulty over tenses: 'is' tends to merge into 'was'. When we first visited BuNyakyusa in 1934 missionaries of various denominations had already been at work, and a foreign government in control, for forty years past. Between 1934 and my last visit in 1955 the changes have been great, but I use the present tense for things seen at first hand, whether earlier or later, and a separate chapter is devoted to the twenty years' change. It is well to recognize at the outset, however, that in 1934 the sanctity and power of the 'divine kings' was already questioned and their rituals were curtailed, and even the pagan cosmology of the Nyakyusa was beginning to exhibit traces of Christian influence. One striking example was the changing, or rather the fluid, connotation of the name *Kyala*.

Two new types of organization developed in BuNyakyusa with the arrival of the Europeans: churches which are based on a principle of association wholly new to the pagan tradition—common belief as opposed to kinship or contiguity; and a centralized system of government. To these have now been added trading concerns, of which the most important are co-operative societies exporting coffee and rice.

The subject of this book is (i) the traditional rituals celebrated on behalf of chiefdoms and groups of chiefdoms, and (ii) the changing ideas and values apparent as a section of the Nyakyusa turn from paganism to Christianity. In the concluding chapters an attempt is made to demonstrate the links between the changes in social structure and the changes in ritual.

[1] Monica Wilson, *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa*, 1957.

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expressed or resolved in ritual. The place for *ukutaya*—speaking out—is the council chamber not the sacred grove or the homestead where the shades gather, and the reconciliation of conflicts between chiefs, or between chiefs and District Commissioner or chiefs and commoners, is sought in a committee rather than a Church. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in modern administration in Africa lies in this very separation of activities, in the *thinness* of the bonds across the colour line, in the cleavage between secular and sacred. Some separation of the different aspects of a society is a concomitant of the increase in scale—it is one manifestation of specialization—but it is greater in Tanganyika with its diversity of religious traditions than it is in Britain with its common Christian history.

That there is a connexion between the form of faith and ritual and the form of social structure few would deny. The concern of the anthropologist is to define it; to plot the limits of autonomy between different aspects within societies. This can be done only by the patient analysis and comparison of many societies and this book is offered as a humble contribution towards such a comparative study.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

In many areas of Eastern Africa the pressure of peasant populations on their tribal lands is a critical feature of the contemporary scene, and this is most especially so in the more fertile parts where the African has accepted the new cash economy and is beginning to appreciate the potentialities of the modern world. The situation has been highlighted recently in the public mind by the publication of the Report of the East African Royal Commission[1] which examined the economic conditions of our time and made general recommendations.

In Tanganyika the overall density of population is low (22 persons per square mile) and the general scale of economic activity still remains little above subsistence level over vast areas of Territory. There are, however, islands of extremely dense populations scattered through the country, often associated with the mountain areas, where soil is fertile, rainfall is reliable and adequate and the cultivation of crops for sale in world markets has gone ahead fairly easily. These populations still comprise peasant farming communities with little capital and their "natural" impulse is to expand their extensive agricultural system rather than to intensify their cultivation on existing holdings. Serious overcrowding soon results for the favourable areas are limited and surrounded by drier bushlands. African attitudes and legal customs concerning their land do not change quickly and they lag behind new conditions of physical limitation and economic development. Whilst the recommendations of the Royal Commission may be valuable in the establishment of general policy, it is obvious that detailed application through time demands a fairly exact knowledge and understanding of particular local conditions if it is to be reasonably successful. This is particularly the case in so large a country as Tanganyika, with its multiplicity of environments and tribal systems of law, land tenure and agriculture, and the social attitudes which encompass them.

The present essay is an attempt, sponsored by Government, to describe and analyse the land and population conditions in one small area of the Territory where a cash economy is emerging and where the pressure of a peasant population on its land resources has become acute. It is hoped that some of this account may be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other similar areas both in Tanganyika and elsewhere, and that the conclusions reached may be helpful in dealing with the problems there; but primarily this is a study of one particular part of the country in order to provide the information upon which detailed policy may be founded.

The Nyakyusa are not entirely typical of many of the Bantu people of East Africa for they have a most distinctive social organisation, peculiar to themselves, based on age-villages and petty, independent chiefdoms. Also, they inhabit a country whose annual rainfall is unusually high, averaging about 100 inches. On the other hand, these people are one of the very few in Tanganyika for whom we have an excellent account of both their pre-European and early European systems of land tenure. Based on this information, obtained *before* modern changes began, we can perceive, analyse

1. *East African Royal Commission 1953-5, Report:* H.M.S.O. 1955. Cmd. 9475.

and try to understand the nature and reasons for change. Here, then, is a good opportunity for the study of social change – not only in land tenure as such, but also in village and family organisation, political authority and economic life.

II

The Nyakyusa are a Bantu people inhabiting the main part of the Rungwe District in southern Tanganyika, immediately to the north of Lake Nyasa. In 1948 they numbered about 199,000 in that District, but about 10,000 men were probably at the time temporarily absent from their homes and in employment in the mines and towns of the Rhodesias and South Africa (see Gulliver, 1957), whilst about 20,000 had migrated to live in the adjacent Mbeya District to the north.

The tribal area comprises a confined geographical basin surrounding the northern end of Lake Nyasa. It extends only about 40 miles from the tip of the lake at 1,550 feet above sea level to the Poroto Mountains in the north at 8,000 feet; and from east to west is only about 30 miles, from the almost sheer walls of the Livingstone Mountains (with peaks up to 10,000 feet) to the Ndali Highlands (rising to about 7,000 feet). There are therefore unusually large ecological differences within so small an area. Three major regions are to be distinguished: the "Northern Highlands" over about 4,500 feet, the low-lying "Lake Plains" in the south, and the "Central Region" in between. Everywhere rainfall is reliable and high, averaging at least 100 inches annually[1], and this amply compensates for a certain poverty and misuse of the soil, although (and particularly in the Central Region) it brings dangers of soil erosion. Except in the highest parts the banana is the staple food, supported by maize, beans, finger millet and groundnuts. In the Northern Highlands coffee has become well established as the principal cash crop: in the Lake Plains paddy rice cultivation provides both a food and a cash crop: in the Central Region the country is too low generally for coffee and too high and dry for rice; consequently cash-cropping is considerably inferior and the people's standard of living is rather poorer.

The Nyakyusa and their country tended for a long time to be relatively isolated from the outside world by high mountain walls and rain-soaked roads. In addition, or because of it perhaps, they developed an almost unique culture which was supported by considerable conservatism and high insularity. They still continue to regard their African neighbours beyond the mountains as their social and cultural inferiors. The turmoil of the slave-trade in Central Africa passed them by; in modern times they have not enthusiastically accepted Christianity and they have refused to take up the use of Swahili, the Territorial *lingua franca*. In recent years, and most especially since the end of World War II, they have, however, accepted and pushed forward with vigour a rapid and extensive economic development, involving particularly the production of coffee and paddy as cash crops, and large-scale labour migration to the south in the high-wage mining industries. The multiplicity of petty, often tiny, independent chiefdoms has been reorganised to provide four local government areas, each under a Rural Council, in which the old chiefdoms have become something like parishes[2]. Although much of the old conservatism and narrow parochialism persists, yet there is now an atmosphere of accepted change, of a keen desire for economic development, and a general acceptance of a cash economy.

Probably the most significant feature of modern life in the Nyakyusa country is the increasing scarcity of land for agriculture in relation to the

1. At Tukuyu, in the Northern Highlands, annual rainfall averaged 99.28 inches between 1919 and 1952: at Kyela, in the Lake Plains, the average between 1940 and 1951 was 106.21 inches.
2. See Kingdon, Z.E.: The initiation of a system of local government by African rural councils in the Rungwe District, Tanganyika; *The Journal of African Administration*, iii, 4, October, 1951.

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people's needs. The importance of this can scarcely be overemphasised for a peasant people who are adopting a cash economy and are socially and emotionally deeply attached to their land – their single, continuous source of capital and their tribal heritage. Apart from the possibilities of labour migration which, so far at any rate, are taken up only temporarily and by the younger men, there are no economic opportunities and no capital to compete with the land. In non-economic life the land remains supreme as the persisting basis of society.

As late as 1940 the District Commissioner, Rungwe, was able to write that there was most generally sufficient land for the people's needs in all parts of the country, and the only competition was perhaps in respect of the very best and most fertile tracts, as had always been the case. G. Wilson recorded similar remarks in the late nineteen-thirties. That these observations were correct cannot be doubted. It is known, for instance, that until the post-war years in the Lake Plains – where now land shortage is most acute – there was a broad belt of mainly unoccupied, uncultivated bushland, infested with game, extending from the Livingstone Mountains in the east to the Nyasaland border in the south-west. There were extensive, more or less empty areas in almost every chiefdom. The people were subsistence farmers only, and also banana eaters, and in this well-watered country their agricultural requirements were adequately met on very modest holdings, from most of which two harvests a year could be gathered.

In the brief period of little more than ten years the situation has altered radically to the point of a general shortage of land (except for some parts in the north-west), and especially in the Lake Plains the available land is quite insufficient to meet the demands of the inhabitants. This critical change is the result partly of an increasing population, augmented by some immigration from other tribal areas; but more especially it is the result of the demands for larger arable holdings to meet cash crop aspirations – i.e., money earning. Although both coffee and paddy rice cultivation had begun before 1939, and both were encouraged and developed during the War years, it was not until after 1945 that both of these cash crops became well and generally established and the demand for money incomes became universal.

III

It was in order to investigate this new situation, which was beginning to become serious and to cause concern to Government, that I made a sociological survey in 1955. I had already spent some months in the country in 1954 investigating labour migration in order to provide Government with information and to make recommendations to deal with the problems arising. The second period of work occupied about five months. During both enquiries I was extremely fortunate in having the use of the excellent monographs of G. and M. Wilson who had carried out a conventional anthropological study of the Nyakyusa between 1934 and 1938. Without their basic work behind me, neither of my two studies would have been possible in so brief a time, and I must gratefully acknowledge the real value of their writings.

The intention had been that a complete enquiry should be made into Nyakyusa land conditions in all parts of the country, and that it should culminate in a full recording of tribal land law and custom with a view to its possible reform. In the event only the initial enquiry in the field in the Lake Plains was completed and the results of that alone are described in this essay. Whereas in former days there were probably few distinctive differences between the various parts of the country, in modern times with the introduction of different cash crops, with differential population growths and varying demands on the land, important divergences seem to be arising. For example,

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In the Northern Highlands there is now a strong tendency for the tight village system to disintegrate as men seek to site their houses, each in his own coffee plot. In the Lake Plains also the structure of the age-village is changing – there the villages persist as such but they come to be inhabited by men of any age and new villages do not emerge with a new chief. No attempt is made here, however, to analyse these variations for they are only now beginning and no satisfactory, detailed information is available for the post-war cash economy of the highland areas.

The Government of Tanganyika has permitted the publication of this essay, and I wish to express my gratitude for its support. The essay is a modified version of my original Report which was presented to Government in January, 1956. The views expressed in it are my own and not those of Government. As usual in my work as Government Sociologist, I have received much valuable assistance, advice and information from officers stationed in the area. The Nyakyusa themselves, as during my first enquiry, were usually cooperative, and at least some of them welcomed my work as a contribution to the easement of their novel difficulties. It would not have been surprising had they remained obdurate and antagonistic towards my enquiries about their land, for like many modern Africans they have a sense of insecurity which is not susceptible to reason. In fact I was able without much difficulty to make any enquiry I wished, to measure sample areas and to discuss the situation in all its aspects. Perhaps it is that an African people welcome a sympathetic enquirer and in their problems genuinely want assistance. The task of a sociologist is of course in some ways rather easier than that of an administrator or technical officer who has to persuade the people actually to accept and practice new ways and to abandon old ways. It is hoped that this essay may be of assistance both to these officers and to the people whom they are attempting to assist and teach.

Finally, I must thank the East African Institute of Social Research which has accepted this essay for publication, and especially Dr. L. A. Fallers who kindly read and criticised the original draft and who drew the two sketch maps.

Note: The term, the "Lake Plains", as used in this essay is to be understood to cover the major part of the modern local government area under the Ntebela Rural Council. Omitted are the small groups of Kisi (Ikombe) and Ndali (Ngana) peoples to the extreme east and west respectively. This area contains the alluvial flood plains surrounding the northern tip of Lake Nyasa, and the lowest foothills to the north where the country begins its steep incline towards the Poroto Mountains. To the south lies the lake and to the south-west, beyond the meandering Songwe river, lie the bushlands of the northern part of the Nyasaland Protectorate. To the east are the towering Livingstone Mountains and to the north live the other Nyakyusa groups in the highlands.

The area comprises a fairly compact social and economic region with a common historical tradition. Several of the indigenous chiefdoms stretch across the intermediate boundary between flood plains and foothills. With but one exception the present chiefs are lineal descendants, in their various houses, of the original Mwakyusa who led the people into this lowland area five generations ago. The modern inhabitants are pre-eminently the Nyakyusa-proper.

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CHAPTER II

THE TRADITIONAL SYSTEM

Although this essay is to be primarily concerned with the modern and changing land and population situation among the Nyakyusa of the Lake Plains, it is quite essential first to have an understanding of the traditional system of political and territorial organisation and of land tenure. This is not mere historicism, for despite changes the traditional system remains as the basis of contemporary land-holding and land law. Whilst actual conditions on the ground change, the Nyakyusa appreciation of those changes and their attitudes to land lag significantly behind. In brief, the traditional system was geared to a situation where there was plenty of land. Today the people find real difficulty in adjusting themselves to a high density of population and an acute shortage of land, with the result that this new situation is aggravated by outmoded practices, attitudes and cultural values.

The ancestors of the present group of peoples now known collectively as the Nyakyusa, moved into the Rungwe region from the Ukinga Highlands to the east beyond the peaks of the Livingstone Mountains. According to legend, which is probably substantially true, these newcomers found a sparsely populated country which they easily occupied. Later, following internecine strife, one group under a man called Mwakyusa left the Masoko area in the centre of present-day Rungwe District and moved down into the Lake Plains. There, probably less than 150 years ago, they drove out the Ngonde people and settled. The sons of Mwakyusa took their shares of the country and people and established their independent chiefdoms. The chiefs in 1956 are the lineal descendants, mainly in the fifth generation, of Mwakyusa, and have a well-known genealogy. The only exception to this occurs amongst the group of tiny chiefdoms in the extreme east under the Livingstones, which now form a single administrative chiefdom under Mwakilasa and number some 400 men. They trace descent from pre-Nyakyusa settlers known as the Saku.

Traditionally, as today, the village was the basic unit both in social life generally and in land-holding in particular. The Nyakyusa village was possibly unique in Africa. It was comprised of men of roughly the same age, together with their wives and young children, and it excluded their fathers and sons and also, very often, their elder and younger brothers. Each village consisted of a close group of houses (often centred on a broad "village street"), with arable and pastoral land around it. Each village had fairly well-defined boundaries with its neighbours. The village was represented as a group and acted corporately through its headman, *lifumu*, who was the guardian of villagers' land rights, the arbiter in land problems and disputes, and the controller of unused land. He was also the political and ritual leader of the village, but nevertheless he was a commoner chosen from amongst the villagers themselves, and was not a member of a chiefly lineage.

Land was owned by the village as a group. Every man resident in the village had a clear right to a site for his house and banana plot and to arable land within the village boundaries; he also had a right to graze his cattle in its communal pastures. Residence gave these rights and members of other villages were excluded. A man who left the village automatically gave up these rights, though if he returned he was able to take up his former holding or its equivalent.